



Recently it would seem that photography is the dominant portal through which visual information is exchanged. The matter of what constitutes a photograph is a question that I often ask and I have resorted to a simple equation:

photo + graph = light + drawing.

The artist and photographer Dietmar Busse exemplifies this analog process.

As an artist, Busse originally worked in the tradition of black and white studio and street photography, with Polaroid, and in the conventions of the darkroom.

This beginning was followed by an unexpected appearance of flora and fauna deployed interchangeably as media and subject in his pictures; the artist used the Polaroid camera to photograph three dimensional assemblages of flower petals to evoke figures in a landscape. He later transitioned to using the body—frequently his own—as a support for the imaging of fantastical human-bestial mosaics constructed from these petals and leaves.

On a recent studio visit, the artist, who has an extravagant sense of personal style, materialized in a smock embroidered with the icons of his unique visual language.

Using chemicals and light, Busse proceeds to exorcize images and stops them from developing. The bodies of fantastical beings, imagined flora, terrible spirits disinterred from the darkness come

to light—some burnished, others blackened—are intimately cast by hand but also vaporized in an unnatural use of darkroom conventions compelling a unique visual language to emerge from the historic vocabulary of photography.

The images created from light and drawing represent an imagined autobiographical world of fairytale enchantment and nightmare with the candid language usually reserved for children. A see-ing tree: an omniscient spirit with ten sets of eyes is set into a magenta dreamscape inhabited by winged griffons, elephants, butterflies, winged llamas, flying roosters and perched owls. The limbs of a tree are embellished with chrysanthemums and the bark is burnished with all manner of bronze petals. It is as though the druid worship of tree spirits is somehow grafted onto Hindu imagery - a syncretic system of blended mysticism and paganism where the temporal and the spiritual have intertwined to produce the super-natural.

While the tantric hand of the East with its ecstatic patterns is leaving no figure undecorated, the entrance into this nightmarish world lies in the primeval caverns of earliest image making in the grottos of Europe. Here too is the evidence of a dichotomy between the universality of images and the personal identity of the artist. At Grotto de Chauvet, where 35,000 years ago, Paleolithic man left us drawings of the Bison, the Horse, the Mastodon, together with the signature of the artist in the form of a palm print – a positive imprint drawn in the dark that can only to be understood in the light.

light + drawing = photography.

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